
V. Dahl
FATHER FOUR SEASONS

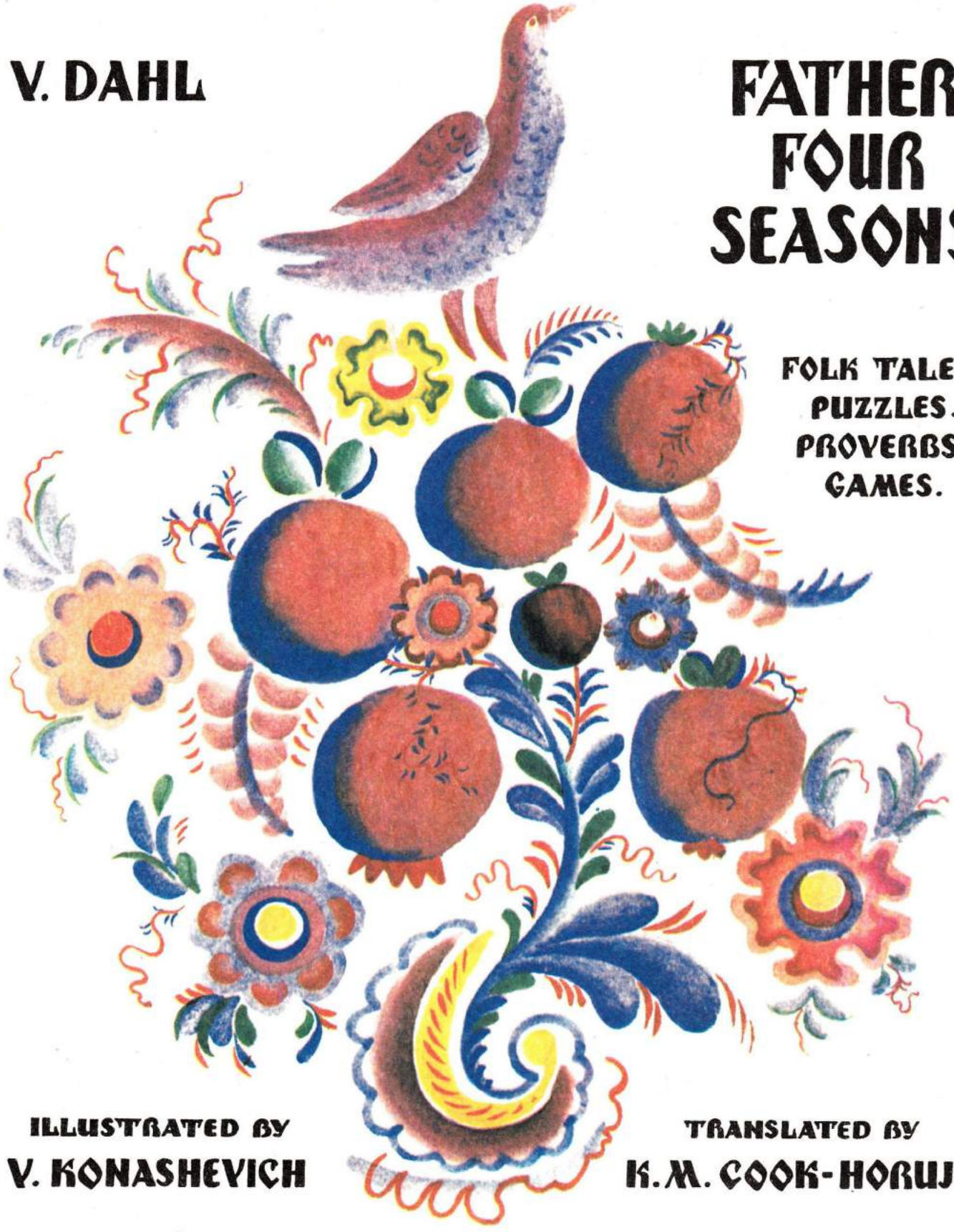




V. DAHL

FATHER FOUR SEASONS

FOLK TALES.
PUZZLES.
PROVERBS.
GAMES.



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The delightful folk tales, puzzles, children's games and proverbs in this book were collected over a century ago by the writer and scholar Vladimir Dahl, who devoted his whole life to studying the Russian language and Russian folklore.

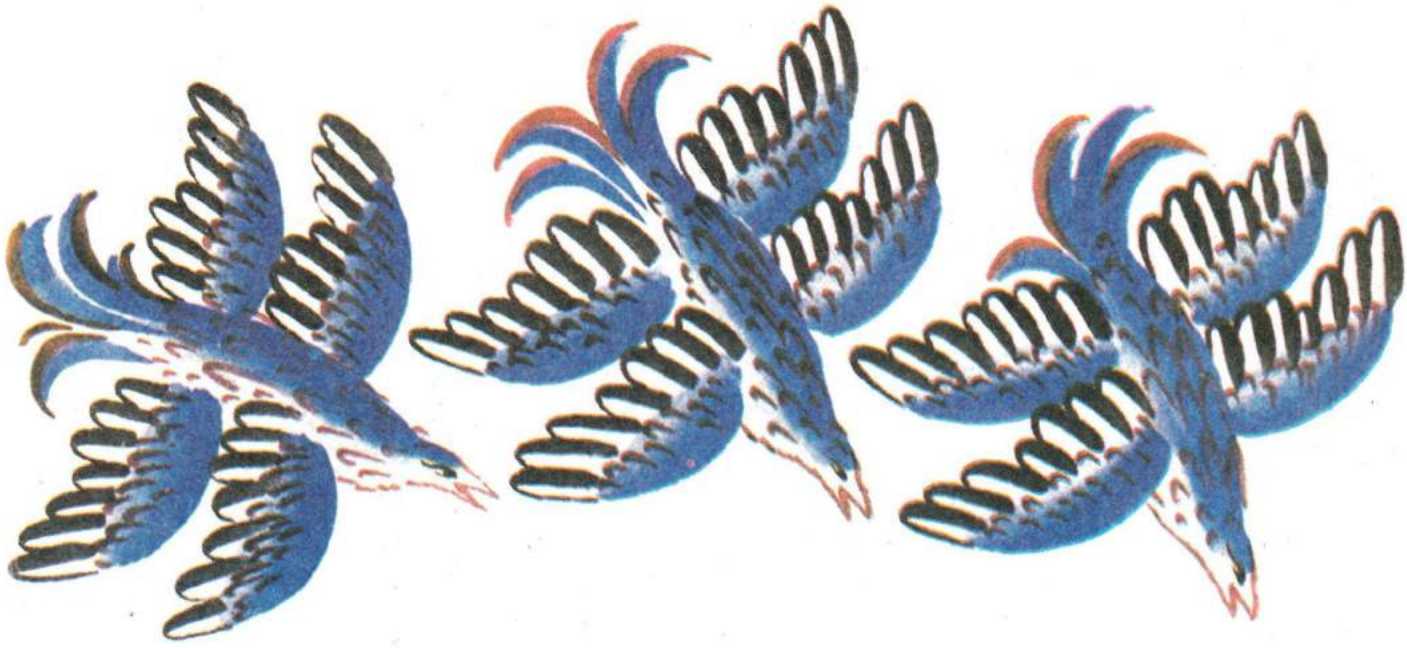
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FATHER FOUR SEASONS

Along came Father Four Seasons, flapped his sleeve and began to let out birds. Each bird had its own name. Father Four Seasons flapped once, and out flew the first three birds. The weather turned cold and it began to snow.

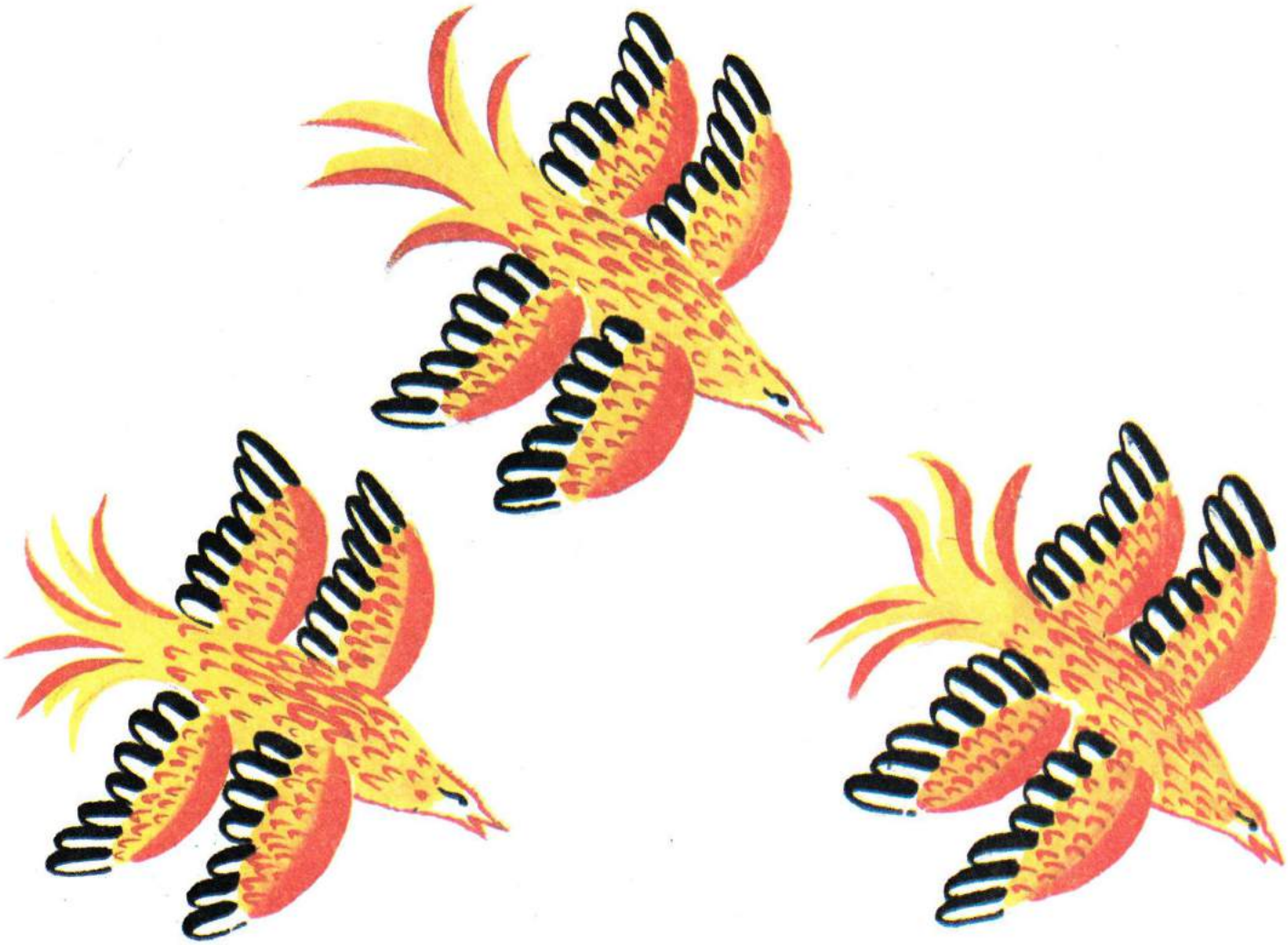




Father Four Seasons flapped a second time, and out flew the second threesome. The snow melted, and flowers bloomed in the fields.

Father Four Seasons flapped a third time, and out flew the third

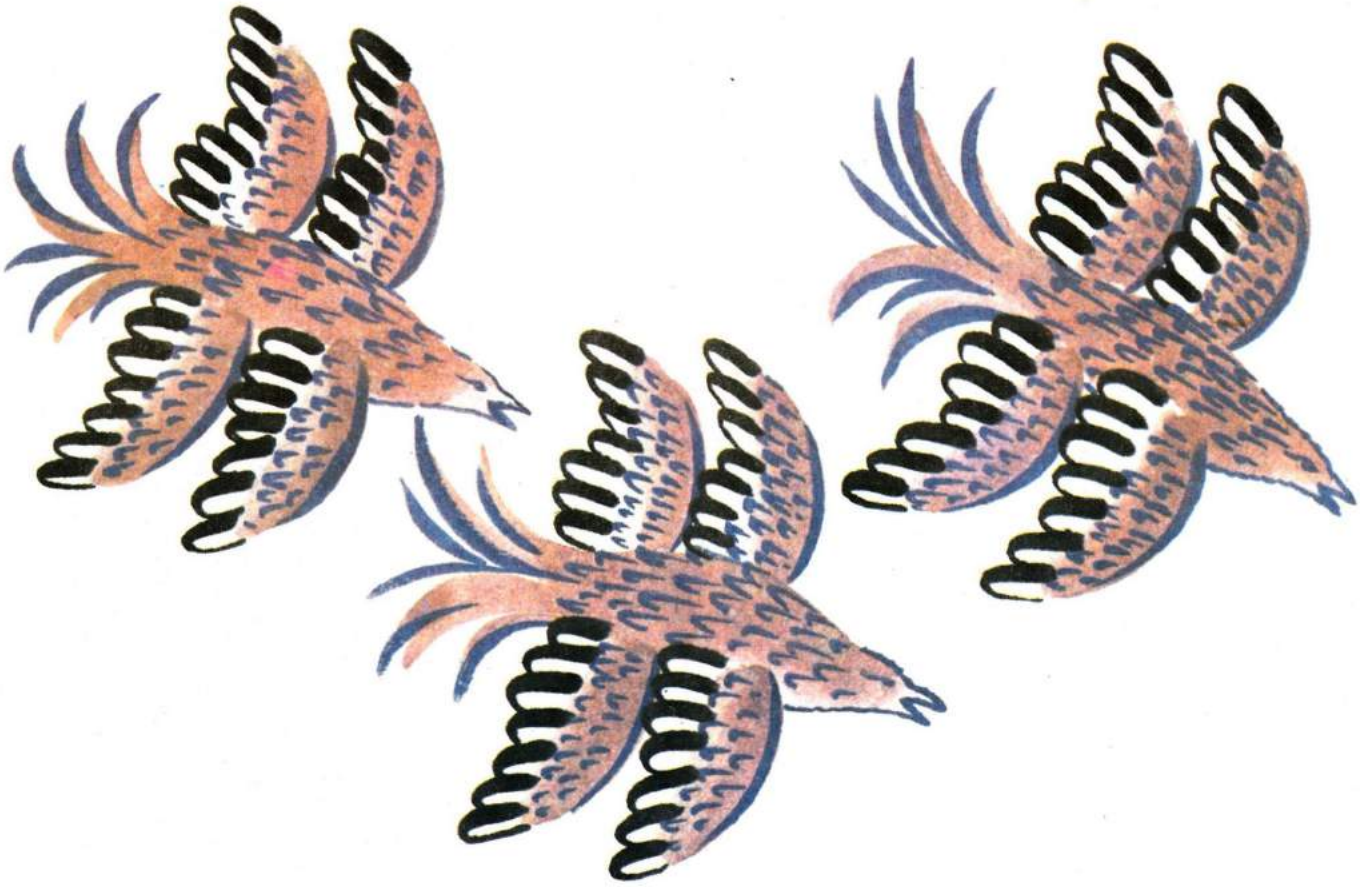




threesome. It grew hot and sunny. The peasants began to harvest the rye.

Father Four Seasons flapped a fourth time, and out flew the last three birds. A cold wind began to blow, and it grew misty and rainy.





Now the birds were not ordinary ones, you know. Each bird had four wings. And each wing had seven feathers. And each feather had its own name too. One half of the feather was white and the other half black. So when the bird flapped its wings one way, it was as light as could be, and when it flapped them the other way, it was pitch dark.

Who are the birds who flew out of Father Four Season's sleeve?

What are the four wings on each bird called?

What are the seven feathers on each wing called?

And what does it mean that each feather has a white half and a black half?



PUZZLES

What is higher than the forest?

(The sun)

What is the slice of bread over Grandma's cottage?

(The moon)

Which dark sister goes to see her fair brother,
but he backs away from her?

(Night and day)

Which bird flaps its wing and covers the light
with a single feather?

(Night)

LITTLE SNOW GIRL

A FOLK TALE

Once upon a time there was an old man and his wife, who had no children, no grandchildren at all. One feast day they went outside and watched other people's children making snowmen and throwing snowballs at one another. The old man picked up a snowball and said to his wife:

"If only you and I had a little daughter as white and chubby as this, wife!"

The old woman looked at the snowball, shook her head and said:

"Well, we haven't and there's no getting one now, so there!"

But the old man took the snowball into the cottage, lay it in a pot, covered it with a piece of cloth and placed it on the window-sill. When the sun rose, it warmed the pot and the snow inside began to melt. Suddenly the old couple heard a lisping sound in the pot under the piece of cloth. They ran up to take a look, and there in the pot lay a little girl, as white and chubby as a snowball.

"I am Little Snow Girl, rolled from the snow of spring, warmed and browned by the sun of spring," she said to them.

The man and his wife were beside themselves with joy. They took her out, and the old woman began sewing her some pretty clothes, while the old man wrapped her in a towel, rocked her and sang this lullaby:

Sleep, Little Snow Girl, sleep,
Our tasty bun so sweet,
Rolled from the snow of spring,
Warmed by the sun of spring.
We'll give you drink a-plenty,
We'll give you food galore,
And make you such a pretty dress
And teach you four times four.



So Little Snow Girl grew up, a joy to the old couple. She was good and clever, as little girls are in fairy tales, but very rarely in real life.

Everything was going well for the old couple and their livestock. The cattle got through the winter safely, and in spring they put the chickens back into the yard. But no sooner had they moved them from the house to

the hen-coop, than the trouble started. A fox came up to the old man's dog Zhuchka, pretending to be ill, and begged her in a whining voice:

"Dear little Zhuchka of the white paws and silky tail, please let me go and warm up in the hen-coop!"

Zhuchka had been with the old man in the forest all day and she didn't know that the old woman had put the chickens back into the coop. So she took pity on the fox and let her in. The fox killed two chickens and dragged them off home. When the old man found out, he gave Zhuchka a beating and drove her out of the yard.

"Be off with you," he said. "You're no good to me as a watchdog!"

So Zhuchka left the old couple's house, whimpering, and only the old woman and Little Snow Girl felt sorry for her.

Summer came, the berries ripened, and Little Snow Girl's friends asked her to come berry-picking in the forest with them. The old man and his wife would not hear of it. But Little Snow Girl's friends promised faithfully not to let go of her hand, and Little Snow Girl herself begged the old couple to let her go berry-picking and see what the forest was like. So in the end they gave her a basket and a piece of pie and let her go.

The girls set off holding Little Snow Girl's hand, but as soon as they got to the forest and saw all the berries, they forgot about everything else and ran off in all directions, picking berries and hallooing to one another.

They filled their baskets with berries, but lost Little Snow Girl in the forest.

Little Snow Girl called out, but no one replied. The poor mite began to cry. She tried to find the path, but got even more lost than before. So she climbed a tree and shouted: "Halloo! Halloo!"

Up came Bear, crunching the dry branches and bending the bushes.

"What's the matter, my pretty one?"

"Halloo! I'm Little Snow Girl, rolled from spring snow and browned by the spring sun. My girlfriends asked my grandparents to let me go with them into the forest, but now they've left me all alone!"

"Come down," said Bear. "I'll take you home."

"No, Bear," Little Snow Girl replied. "I won't go with you. I'm afraid of you. You'll eat me!"

So Bear went away.



Up ran Grey Wolf.
"Why are you crying, my pretty one?"
"Halloo! I'm Little Snow Girl, rolled from spring snow and browned



by the spring sun. My girlfriends asked my grandparents to let me go berry-picking with them in the forest, and now they've left me all alone!"

"Climb down," said Wolf. "I'll take you home!"

"No, Wolf, I won't go with you. I'm afraid of you. You'll eat me."

So Wolf went away. Then Fox came up.

"Why are you crying, my pretty one?"

"Halloo! I'm Little Snow Girl, rolled from spring snow and browned by the spring sun. My girlfriends asked my grandparents to let me go berry-picking with them in the forest, and now they've left me all alone!"

"Never mind, my poor little pretty one! Come down quickly, and I'll take you home!"

"No, Fox of the honeyed words, I'm afraid of you. You'll lead me to Wolf or give me to Bear. I'm not going with you!"

Fox began stalking round the tree, looking at Little Snow Girl and trying to lure her down, but the little girl would not go.

"Wuff, wuff, wuff!" barked a dog in the forest.

"Halloo there, Zhuchka!" cried Little Snow Girl. "Halloo, my darling doggy! It's me, Little Snow Girl, rolled from spring snow and browned by the spring sun. My girlfriends asked my grandparents to let me go berry-picking with them in the forest, and now they've left me all alone. Bear wanted to carry me off, but I wouldn't go. Wolf wanted to take me away, but I refused. And Fox tried to lure me down, but I wouldn't be tricked by her. But I'll go with you, Zhuchka!"

At the sound of the dog barking, Fox turned tail and fled for dear life.

Little Snow Girl climbed down the tree. Zhuchka rushed up, licked her face all over and set off home with her.

Bear was hiding behind a tree-stump, Wolf was skulking in a glade and Fox was lurking in the bushes.

Zhuchka barked loudly, and they were so frightened that they dared not come close.

They arrived home, and the old couple wept for joy. They fed Little Snow Girl, put her in her nice cosy bed and sang:

Sleep, Little Snow Girl, sleep,
Our tasty bun so sweet,
Rolled from the snow of spring,
Warmed by the sun of spring.





We'll give you drink a-plenty,
We'll give you food galore,
And make you such a pretty dress
And teach you four times four.

Zhuchka was forgiven. They gave her a nice saucer of milk and put her back in her old kennel to guard the house again.



PUZZLES

A white cloth so large that it covers everything.

(Snow)

What can build a bridge without using planks or an axe?

(Ice)

What warms in winter, melts in spring, dies in summer and comes to life again in autumn?

(Snow)

THE CRANE AND THE HERON

A FOLK TALE

Up flew the owl, a cheerful fowl. She flapped around, then sat her down, she turned her head and peered about, then off she went and fluttered out. She flew around, then sat her down, she turned her head and peered about, then off she went and fluttered out. But with eyes like that, she's blind as a bat!

That's not the whole story. It's just the beginning. The rest is coming now.

Spring arrived to drive away winter and bring the green grass out of the ground. Up popped the green grass to look at the sun, bringing with it the first flowers—snowdrops, blue and white, purple and yellow.

The birds flocked back from other lands, geese and swans, cranes and herons, sandpipers and ducks, songbirds and perky tomtits. They were coming to Russia to build their nests and lay their eggs here. They spread out in all directions, in the steppes, forests, marshes and streams.

A solitary crane stood in a field, staring round him, stroking his head





and thinking to himself: "It's time I set up home, made a nest and found me a wife."

So he built a nest right by a marsh. Now on a hummock in the marsh sat a long-nosed heron. She sat there, peeping at the crane now and then



and giggling to herself: "What a funny, clumsy old thing he is!"

Meanwhile the crane had a bright idea. "Why don't I go and court the heron? She's almost from the same family as us: she's got the same beak and long legs." So off he went, treading a path through the marsh. Squelch,



squelch, his legs and tail got stuck in the mud. He leant on his beak to pull out his tail and his beak got stuck. Then he pulled out his beak and his tail got stuck. At last he reached the heron's hummock in the rushes and asked:

"Is Mistress Heron at home?"

"Yes, she is. What might you want?"

"Will you marry me?" asked the crane.

"Well. I never! Me marry a lanky old bean-pole like you! Your clothes are too short, you go everywhere on foot, and you live very frugally. I'd starve to death in your nest!"

The crane was very insulted. He turned round without another word and set off home. Squelch, squelch, squelch.

The heron thought it over and changed her mind. "Why did I have to refuse him? I don't want to be a spinster all my life, do I? He's from a good



family. They say he's a bit of a dandy, and he's got that fancy crest. I'll go and make it up with him."

So off went the heron. It was a long way across the marsh, and she kept sinking into the mud, first one leg, then the other. When she lifted one out, the other got stuck. When she pulled out her wing, her beak got caught. But at last she arrived and said:

"I will marry you, Crane!"

"No, Heron," said the Crane. "I've changed my mind. I don't want to marry you. Go back home!"

The Heron was so ashamed. She covered her head with her wing and set off back to her hummock. As the Crane watched her go, he regretted sending her away. He hopped out of his nest and set off after her across the marsh. He went up to her and said:

"Alright then, Heron. I'll take you for my wife."

But the Heron sat there fuming and refused to speak to him.

"Do you hear, Mistress Heron? I'll take you for my wife," the Crane repeated.

"Take what you like, but I'm not marrying you!" she retorted.

So the Crane set off home again. "What a temper," he thought. "I wouldn't marry her for anything now."

The Crane settled down in the grass and wouldn't even look in the direction where the Heron lived. The Heron changed her mind yet again. "It's better to have a husband than to live alone. I'll make it up with him and be his wife."

So off she tottered again across the marsh. It was a long way and she kept sinking into the mire. First one leg got stuck, then the other. She pulled out her wing and her beak got caught. At last she struggled up to the Crane's nest and said:

"Listen, Craney dear. I've decided to marry you after all!"

But the Crane retorted:

"Fedora refuses to marry Egor, but even if she wanted to Egor wouldn't have her."

With that he turned his back on the Heron, and away she went.

The Crane thought and thought and again regretted not marrying the Heron when she had agreed. So he got up quickly and set off again across the marsh. Squelch, squelch he went, his legs and tail sinking into the mud. He pulled out his tail and his beak got stuck, then he pulled out his beak and his tail got stuck.

And to this very day they are still crossing the marsh in turn to see each other. A path they've laid, but no home they've made!



PUZZLES

Two brothers look at each other in the water,
but never meet.

(River banks)

One says, "Let's run."
The other says, "Let's stand still."
The third says, "Let's sway in the breeze."

(Water, a bank, grass)

A brave little chap popped out of the ground
And then a bright red cap he found.

(Mushroom)

FLY AWAY

A GAME



The players sit round the table and each put a finger on it.

The leader begins the game. He calls out the name of a bird or flying insect, then lifts his finger high up and quickly puts it down on the table again.

All the other players must "fly" too, i.e., lift their fingers and put them down again. If anyone doesn't do this or flies when the leader says the name of a creature that cannot fly, he must pay a forfeit. The forfeits are reclaimed later.

Here is an example. The leader lifts up his finger and says:

"Fly away, owl!" and the other players lift and put down their fingers.

"Fly away, goat!" says the leader, lifting his finger and putting it down again.

Any player who "flies" then must pay a forfeit.







































THE WAR OF THE MUSHROOMS AND THE BERRIES

A FOLK TALE

That summer the forests were full of mushrooms and berries, wild strawberries and bilberries, raspberries and blackberries, and juicy black currants. Young girls sang happily as they went berry-picking in the woods, but the big boletus mushroom sat fuming under an oak-tree, pouting and straining out of the ground, furious with the berries.

"What a lot of them there are! People used to come hunting for us, but now they don't even look at us!" Then the boletus, the king of all the mushrooms, had an idea.

"We, mushrooms, must get together and wipe those horrid berries off the face of the earth!"

The big boletus under the oak-tree put on his thinking cap and planned the war. Then he began to summon the other mushrooms to take up arms.

"Off to the war you go, milk caps!"

But the milk caps refused.

"We're all old women. You can't call us up!"

"Off to battle, honey agarics!"

"We can't go in, our legs are too thin!"

"Hey there, morels!" the big boletus shouted. "Put on your uniforms!"

But the morels refused.

"We're all old men. Leave us alone."

The boletus lost his temper and cried in a loud voice:

"Milk agarics, you're a fine lot of lads, come with me to fight those big-headed berries!"

And the milk agarics cried as a man:

"We, milk agarics, are a fine lot of lads! We'll go with you to fight the berries of forest and field. We'll knock them down with our caps and grind them with our heels!"

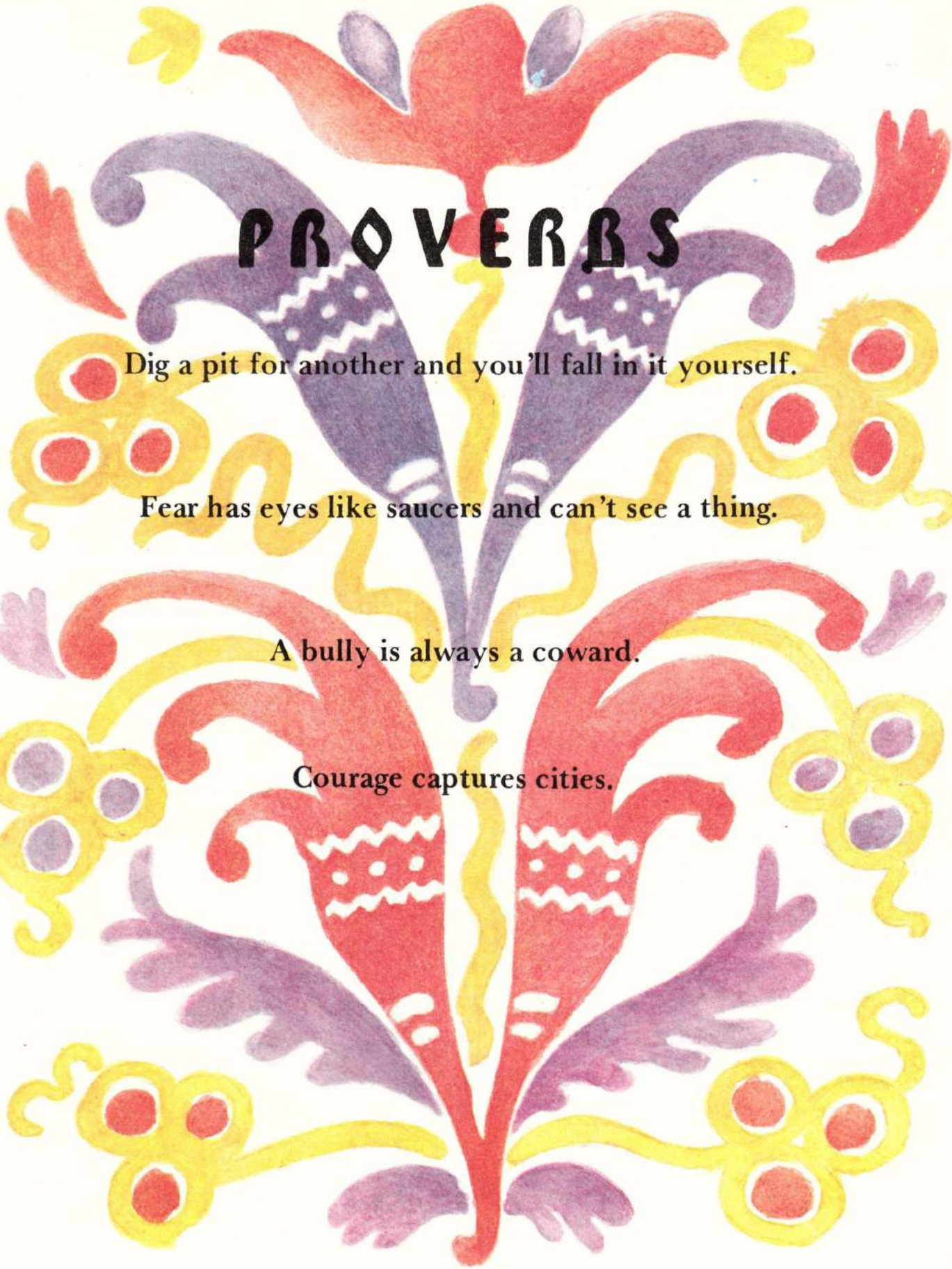
So saying, the milk agarics hopped out of the ground. Dry leaves rose above their heads, as the fearful host marched off.

"This means trouble," thought the green grass.

Just then Aunty Barbara of the Big Pockets came into the forest with a basket. Seeing the crowd of milk agarics, she exclaimed with delight, squatted down and scooped them into her basket by the handful. It was so heavy she could hardly carry it home. There she sorted the mushrooms out: the milk caps into milk cans, the honey agarics into honey pots, the morels into barrels and the milk agarics into buckets. The big boletus was strung up and dried, then sold at the market.

Ever since then the mushrooms have stopped fighting the berries.





PROVERBS

Dig a pit for another and you'll fall in it yourself.

Fear has eyes like saucers and can't see a thing.

A bully is always a coward.

Courage captures cities.

BASKET

A GAME



The players sit round a table. One of them puts a basket on the table and says to his neighbour:

"Take this basket and pretend to put something beginning with ba- into it. If you make a mistake, you must pay a forfeit."

The players take the basket in turn and each say a word beginning with ba-. "I'll put in a ball, a bag, a bat, a baby, a balloon, etc." The first player who can't think of an object has to pay a forfeit. The game can continue with bi-, bo- and so on all through the alphabet.

At the end the forfeits are reclaimed. The basket is covered up and one of the players asks:

"What is the owner of the next forfeit to do?"

The players take turns in thinking of something, such as hopping round the room on one leg or doing something different in each corner, such as, standing in one, dancing in another, crying in another and laughing in another. The forfeit owners can also be asked to tell a story, guess a puzzle or sing a song.















THE FOX AND THE BEAR

A FOLK TALE

In her old age Mistress Fox grew tired of fending for herself and went to ask Bear if she could come and live with him.

"Do let me, Mikhailo Potapych. I'm a clever old Fox. I won't take up much room or eat you out of house and home. I'll just gnaw the bones after you've finished with them."

Bear agreed without much ado. So Fox went to live with Bear and began sniffing around to see what he had stored there. Misha lived well. He always had plenty to eat and he fed Fox well too. Now Fox had a sweet tooth, just like Bear. One day she noticed a tub of honey in the lobby. She lay awake that night wondering how she could have a lick of it. Then she thumped her tail and said to Bear:

"Is that a knock at the door, Misha?"

Bear listened hard.

"You're right," he said. "It is a knock at the door."

"Someone must be ill, and they want me to make him better."

"You'd better go then," said Bear.

"I don't feel like getting up!"

"Go on," said Misha. "I won't lock the door after you."



Fox climbed down from the stove-bench slowly with a sigh, but outside she clambered quickly onto the shelf and opened the tub of honey. Then she ate and ate, the whole top layer, until she was full up. Then she laid

the cloth over the tub, put on the lid, placed the stone on top, tidied everything just as it was, then went back into the hut as if nothing had happened.

"Have you been far, Mistress?" asked Bear.

"No, not very far, Master. It was our neighbours. Their child is sick."

"Does it feel better now?"

"Oh, yes, much better."

"What's its name?"

"Its name is Toppety, Master."

"Never heard of a name like that," said Bear.

"Well, there are plenty of strange names around, Master!"

Bear went to sleep, and Fox slept too.

Fox longed for some more honey, so the next night she lay on the stove-bench and thumped her tail on it.

"Is that a knock at the door, Misha?"

"So it is!"

"They must have come for me."

"Then you'd better be going, Mistress," said Bear.

"I don't feel a bit like getting up. My old bones are aching."

"Go on," said Bear. "I won't lock the door after you."

Fox climbed down from the stove-bench with a sigh, but outside she climbed swiftly onto the shelf, got the honey and ate the whole middle layer, until she was full up. Then she laid the cloth over the tub, put on the lid, placed the stone on top, tidied up and went back to the hut.

"Have you been far, Mistress?" asked Bear.

"No, not very far, Master. It was our neighbours. Their child is sick."

"Does it feel better now?"

"Oh, yes, much better."

"What's its name?"

"Its name is Middley."

"Never heard of a name like that," said Bear.

"Well, there are lots of strange names around!" Fox replied.

And with that the two of them went to sleep.

Fox liked the honey so much, that the third night she lay on the stove-bench, thumped her tail and asked Bear:

"Is that a knock at the door, Misha?"

Bear listened and said:

"So it is, Mistress."

"They must have come for me."

"Then you'd better be going," said Bear.

"I don't feel a bit like getting up. My old bones are aching. I haven't had a proper night's sleep for ages."

"Go on," said Bear. "I won't lock the door after you."



Fox climbed down from the stove-bench with a sigh and trudged over to the door, but outside she climbed quickly onto the shelf and got the honey. Then she gobbled up all that was left. Then she laid the cloth on the tub, put on the lid, placed the stone on top and tidied everything away. After that she went into the hut, climbed onto the stove and curled up in a ball.

"Have you been far, Mistress?" Bear asked her.

"No, not very far, Master. The neighbours asked me to cure their child."

"Does it feel better now?"

"Oh, yes, much better."

"What's its name?"

"Leftovers, Misha. Leftovers, Potapych."

"Never heard of a name like that," said Bear.

"Well, there are plenty of strange names around!"

Bear went to sleep, and Fox did likewise.

Time passed, and Fox began to feel like some more honey. She was very fond of sweet things. So one night she pretended to be ill and coughed so hard that Bear couldn't get to sleep.

"That's a nasty cough, Mistress Fox," said Misha. "You should take something for it."

"I've got some medicine. All I need is a little honey to add to it, and then I'll be right as rain."

Misha got up and went into the lobby to fetch the tub of honey. But there was nothing in it!

"Where's my honey gone?" roared Bear. "This is your doing, Mistress Fox, I'll be bound."

Fox coughed hard and said nothing.

"Who's eaten my honey, Mistress Fox?"

"What honey?"

"The honey that was in the tub."

"If it was your honey, you must have eaten it," Fox replied.

"No," said Bear. "I didn't eat it. I was saving it. You must have gobbled it up."

"What a thing to say! First you invite me here, poor helpless thing that I am, then you want to get rid of me! But I won't have it. I'll find the guilty one, the one who ate up the honey."

Hearing this, Bear cheered up and said:

"Yes, please find out who ate my honey!"

"We must lie down in the sun, then the honey will melt and run out of the stomach of the one who ate it."

So they lay down in the warm sun. When Bear began to snore, Fox hurried home, scraped the last bit of honey out of the tub and smeared it all over Misha's tummy. Then she washed her paws and woke him up.

"Wake up, I've found the thief! I've found the thief!"

Fox shouted in Bear's ear.

"Where?" roared Bear.

"Here he is," said Fox and showed Misha the honey on his tummy.

Misha sat up, rubbed his eyes and put his paw on his tummy. It was all sticky.

"See, Mikhailo Potapych. The sun has melted the honey inside you. So in future don't try to blame other people for things you've done yourself!"

So saying, Fox turned tail and disappeared in the twinkling of an eye.



PROVERBS

A fox covers up everything with her tail.

When you look for a fox ahead of you, it's bound to be behind.

Boast if you will, but you'll fall down the hill.

If you can't be bothered, you won't even land the tiniest tiddler in the pond.



THE FOX AND THE BAST SHOE

A FOLK TALE

One winter night a hungry fox was walking along a path. Dark clouds hung overhead, and a light snow was falling over the plain.

"If only I could find a bite to eat," thought the fox. On she walked, until she saw an old bast shoe lying on the path. "Even that might come in handy," thought the fox. So she picked it up in her teeth and went on. She came to a village and knocked at the door of the first house.

"Who's there?" asked the peasant, opening the window.

"It's me, Sister Fox. Please may I spend the night here, friend?"

"We're cramped enough without you!" said the peasant and started to close the window.

"But I won't take up much room," the fox begged. "I'll just lie on the bench, tuck my tail tidily beneath it, and that's all."

The old man took pity on the fox and let her in.

"Be sure to look after my bast shoe," she said to him.

The peasant took the shoe and threw it under the stove.

That night when everyone was asleep the fox climbed quietly down from the bench, crept up to the shoe, pulled it out and threw it deep down into the stove. Then she climbed back on the bench and lay down, tail tucked tidily beneath it.

It began to get light. The couple woke up. The old woman lit the stove, and the old man got ready to go and collect firewood.

The fox woke up too and went to fetch her bast shoe. Seeing it wasn't there, she began wailing:

"The old man's stolen my belongings! I wouldn't take a chicken in return for my bast shoe!"

The peasant looked under the stove. There was no shoe. But he'd put it there himself! What could have happened to it? He got a chicken and gave it to the fox. But the fox started moaning that she wouldn't take the chicken and howling for all to hear that the peasant had deceived her.

The peasant and his wife did all they could to pacify the fox. They poured her a saucer of milk, crumbled up some bread, fried her some eggs and treated her royally. Which was just what the fox wanted. She jumped onto the bench, ate the bread, lapped the milk, gobbled up the fried eggs, popped the chicken in her bag, then bade farewell to the old couple and set off on her way.

And as she went she sang this little song:

Hungry Sister Fox
Was a-walking in the dark
When she found a bast shoe
Lying there on the path.
She took it to some folk and
Exchanged it for a chicken.



That evening she arrived at another village. Knock, knock, knock, she went at the door.

"Who's there?" asked the peasant.

"It's me, Sister Fox. Please may I spend the night here, Uncle?"

"We're cramped enough without you. Off you go," said the man, slamming the window.

"But I won't take up much room," said the fox. "I'll just lie on the bench, tuck my tail tidily beneath it, and that's that."

So they let the fox in. She bowed to the master, gave him her chicken to look after, and settled down quietly in a corner on the bench, her tail tucked tidily beneath it.

The peasant took the chicken and put it in with the ducks. The fox saw all this and, as soon as the couple were asleep, she climbed quietly down from the bench, crept up to the coop, pulled out the chicken, plucked it, gobbled it up, and hid the feathers and bones under the stove. Then she

climbed back onto the bench, cool as a cucumber, curled up and went to sleep.

It began to get light. The wife busied herself at the stove, while her husband went to feed the cattle.

The fox woke up too and prepared to leave. She thanked the couple for the warm bench and asked the peasant for her chicken.

The peasant went to fetch it, but found that it had gone! He hunted all over the place, but there was no sign of it!

The fox began to wail loudly:

"My little henny, my dear Blacky, those nasty speckled ducks have pecked you to death, those horrid grey-feathered drakes have choked you. I wouldn't take a duck in place of you!"

The wife took pity on the fox and said to her husband:

"Let's give her a duck and a good meal before she goes."

So they fed the fox, gave her a duck and saw her on her way.

Off trotted the fox, licking her lips and singing her little song:

Hungry Sister Fox
Was a-walking in the dark
When she found a bast shoe
Lying there on the path.
So she took it to some folk and
Exchanged it for a chicken,
Then the chicken for a duck.

On and on went the fox, until it began to get dark. She saw a house in the trees and turned off the path. Tap, tap, tap, she knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" asked the man.

"It's Sister Fox and I've lost my way. My legs are worn out and I'm cold as can be. Please let me come in to rest and warm up!"

"I'd be only too glad, Sister, but we've no room!"

"Oh, I don't need much space. I'll just lie down on the bench, tuck my tail tidily beneath it, and there you are!"

The peasant thought for a moment, then let the fox in. She was delighted. She bowed to the man and his wife and asked them to look after her flat-billed duck until morning



They took the flat-billed duck and put it in with the geese. The fox lay down on the bench, tucked her tail tidily beneath it and started snoring.

"She's worn out, poor thing," said the wife, climbing onto the stove-shelf.

The couple were soon fast asleep, and this was just what the fox had been waiting for. Climbing quietly down from the bench, she crept up to the geese, grabbed her flat-billed duck, bit its neck, plucked it clean and gobbled it up, hiding the bones and feathers under the stove. Then she went back to bed, cool as a cucumber, and slept until the sun was high. Waking up, she stretched and looked round. Only the wife was at home.

"Where is your husband, Mistress?" asked ther fox. "I must bid him farewell and thank him for his hospitality."

"It's too late for that," said the old woman. "He went off to market bright and early."

"Then I'll take my leave of you, Mistress," said the fox with a bow. "I expect my flat-billed duck is awake now. Get it for me, and we'll be on our way. It's high time."

The old woman went to fetch the duck. She looked all over the place, but there was no sign of it. What was she to do? Behind her pouted the fox, wailing for all to hear. Where was her beautiful gold-speckled duck? She wouldn't take even a goose in place of it.

The wife grew alarmed and bowed to the fox.

"Choose any goose you like, Mother Fox Patrikeyevna! And I'll give you a fine meal with plenty of eggs and butter."

The fox agreed, ate her fill, chose the plumpest goose, popped it in her bag, bade farewell to the wife and set off on her way, singing this little song as she went.

Hungry Sister Fox
Was a-walking in the dark
When she found a bast shoe
Lying there on the path.
So she took it to some folk and
Exchanged it for a chicken,
Then the chicken for a duck,
Then the duck for a goose!

On she went, until she began to get tired. The goose in her bag was so heavy that she had to keep stopping for a rest. Darkness fell, and the fox tried to find somewhere to spend the night. But wherever she knocked, the answer was always no. She went up to the very last house and gave a very quiet, timid knock. Tap, tap, tap!

"Who's there?" asked the man.

"Please let me in to warm up and spend the night."

"We've no room as it is!"

"I won't take up much space," the fox replied. "I'll just lie down on the bench, tuck my tail tidily beneath it, and that's that."

The man took pity on the fox and let her in. She gave him her goose to look after, and he put it in with the turkeys. But word of the fox had reached there from the market.

"Can this be the fox everyone's talking about?" the man wondered and kept a careful eye on her. She settled quietly down on the bench, tucking her tail tidily beneath it, and waited for the couple to go to sleep. The wife began snoring, and the husband pretended to be asleep too.



Then the fox jumped down to the turkey coop, grabbed her goose, bit its neck, plucked it and started to gobble it up. She kept having to stop for a rest. A goose is quite a mouthful after all! The old man watched her eat and saw her take the bones and feathers and put them under the stove. Then she lay down on the bench and went to sleep.

The fox slept later than ever this time, and the peasant had to wake her up.

"Had a good sleep, Mistress Fox?"

But the fox only stretched and rubbed her eyes.

"It's time you got going. Time to be on your way," said the man, opening the door wide.

"No need to let the cold in. I'll make my own way, but first I must collect my belongings. Fetch me my goose."

"What goose?" asked the man.

"The one I gave you yesterday evening to look after. You took it, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did," the man replied.

"Then give it back," the fox insisted.

"Your goose isn't in the coop. Go and see for yourself. There are only turkeys in there."

When she heard this, the crafty fox flung herself down on the floor and began weeping and wailing that she wouldn't even take a turkey in return for her dear little goose.

The peasant smiled to himself. "Just wait," he thought. "You'll remember your goose for a long time."

"What can we do?" he said. "We'll have to come to some agreement."

He promised to give her a turkey in place of the goose. But instead of a turkey, he put a dog in her sack. Suspecting nothing, the fox picked up the sack, bade the man farewell and set off.





On she went until she felt like singing the little song about herself and the bast shoe. So she sat down, put the sack on the ground and was just going to start singing, when suddenly out jumped the dog and rushed at her. She turned tail and fled, the dog hot on her heels.

The two of them ran into the forest, the fox bounding over tree-stumps and bushes, with the dog close behind.

Fortunately for the fox she found a hole and leapt into it. The dog was too big for the hole, so it waited for the fox to come out...

The fox was panting hard with fear. After a little rest she began talking to herself and asking herself questions.

"Ears, my ears, what did you do?"

"We listened to make sure the dog didn't eat the fox."

"Eyes, my eyes, what did you do?"

"We watched to make sure the dog didn't eat the fox."

"Legs, my legs, what did you do?"

"We ran to make sure the dog didn't catch the fox."

"Tail, tail, what did you do?"

"I got in your way, catching on all the tree-stumps and branches."

"So you got in my way, did you? I'll teach you to do that!" said the fox. She stuck her tail out of the hole and shouted to the dog: "Here, eat that!"

The dog grabbed the tail and pulled the fox out of the hole.

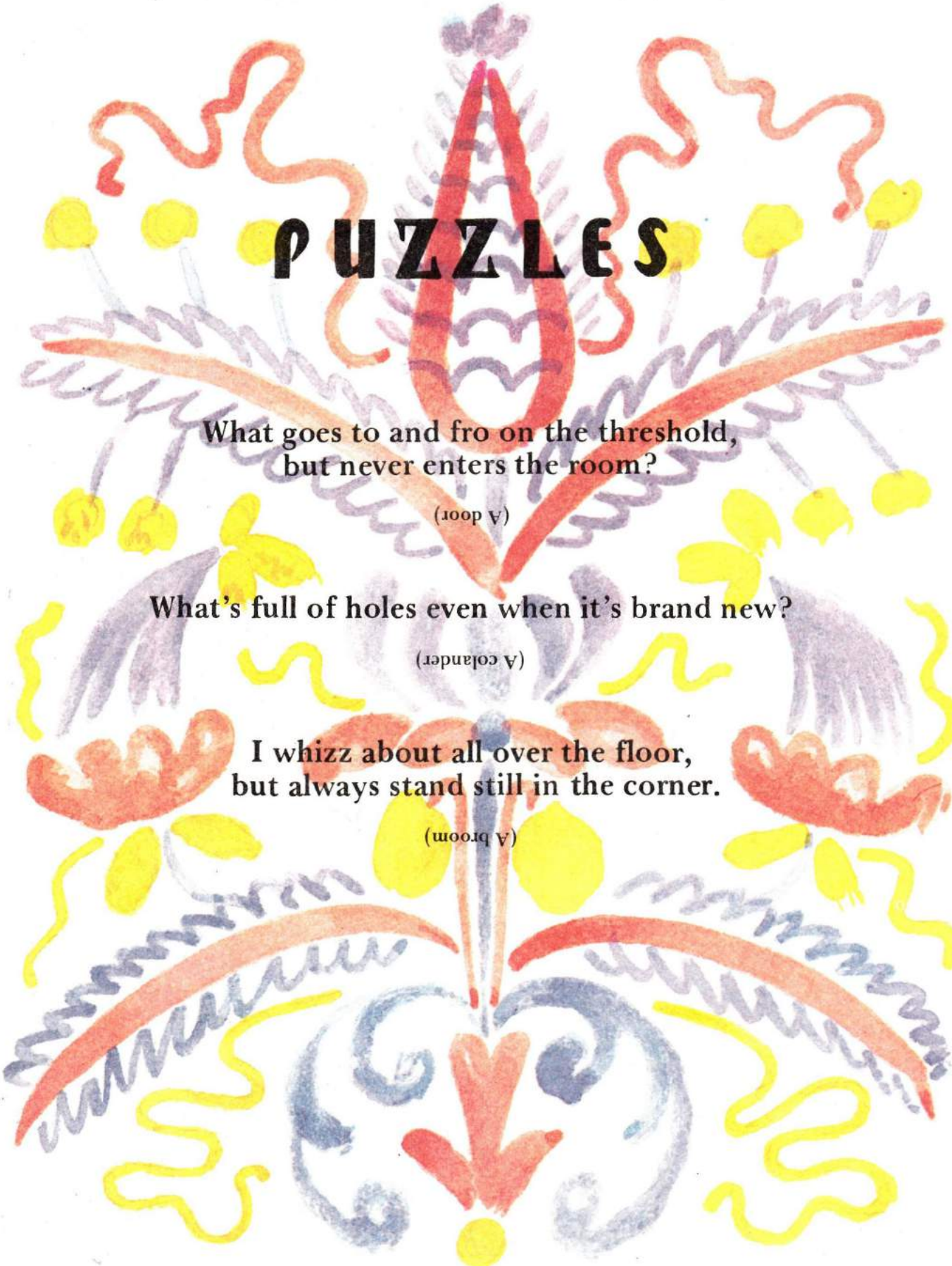




POOR PUSSY

Poor Pussy Cat
By the window sat.
Tom Cat passed by
And heard her cry.

"Dear Puss, tell me why
Do you weep and sigh?"
"The wicked cook
Some liver took,
Then, to his shame,
Said I was to blame.
Now I'm in disgrace
And can't show my face
Or I'll get a good hiding!"



PUZZLES

What goes to and fro on the threshold,
but never enters the room?

(A door)

What's full of holes even when it's brand new?

(A colander)

I whizz about all over the floor,
but always stand still in the corner.

(A broom)

LITTLE HARE

A GAME

The players choose a hare and form a circle round him. The hare dances all the time, looking for a way of breaking out of the circle. The players move round him singing this song:



Hop, hop, Little Hare.
Skip, skip, little Grey-coat.
Turn to the right and round you go!
Now to the left and round you go!
Clap, clap, Little Hare.
Clap your paws, little Grey-coat.
Turn to the right and round you go,
Now to the left and round you go!
Through the gap and skip away,
Off little Grey-coat runs to play.
Turn to the right and round you go,
Now to the left and round you go!



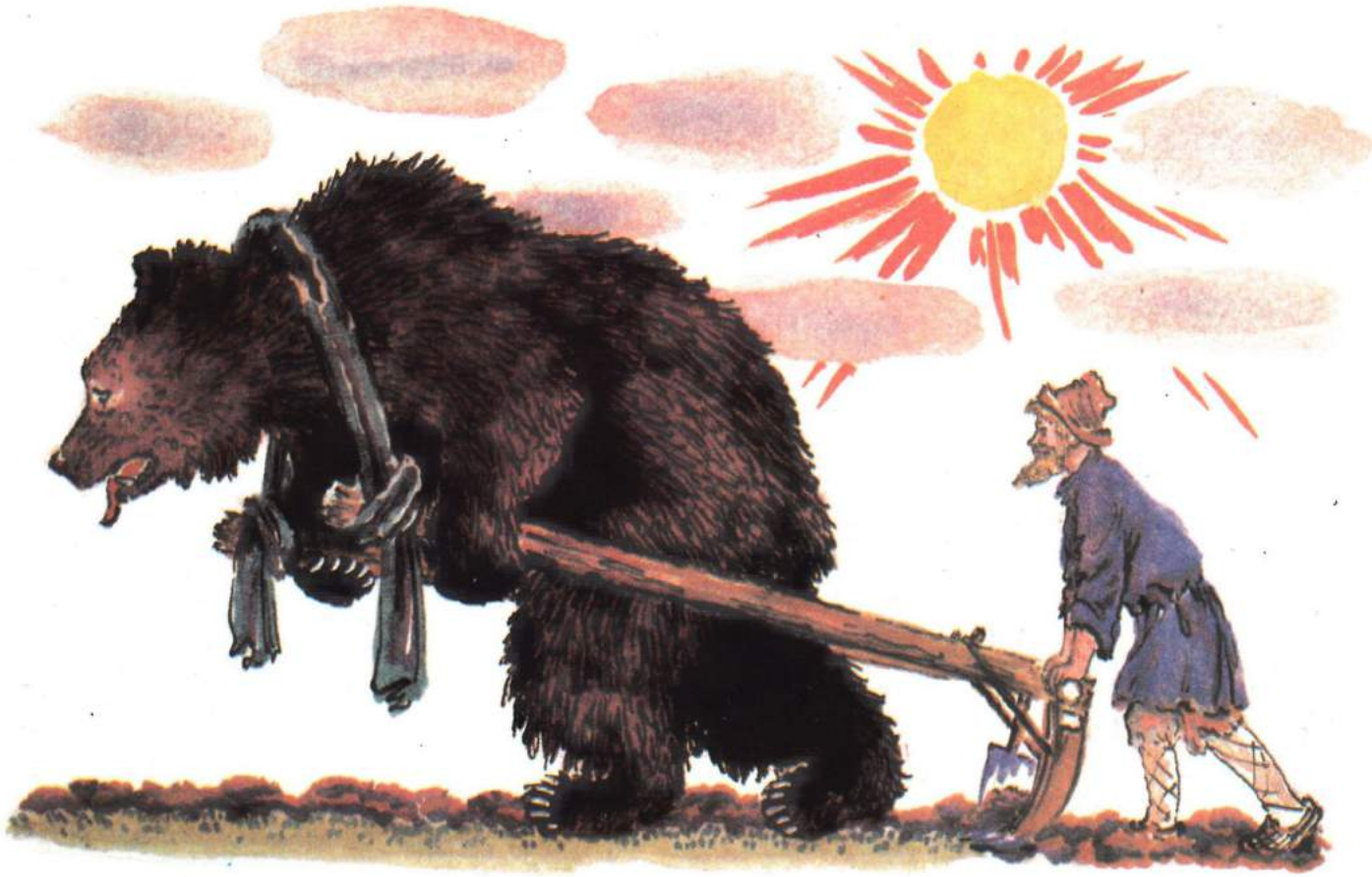
While they are singing, some of the players raise their hands, inviting Little Hare to slip under them.

Little Hare squats on the ground trying to find a place to escape. He breaks out of the circle at a point where the players are not expecting him to, and runs away.









THE BEAR WHO WENT A-PLOUGHING

A FOLK TALE

Once upon a time there was a peasant who lived in the last house in the village, right next to the forest. And in that forest there lived a bear. In autumn the bear would get his den ready to spend the winter lying in it and sucking his paw with hunger. The peasant worked hard in spring, summer and autumn, so in winter he lived on cabbage soup and buckwheat, washing it down with a drink of kvass. The bear envied the peasant. One day he went to him and said:

"Let's be friends, neighbour!"

"A bear's hug is enough to cripple a man!" the peasant replied.

"I won't cripple you," said the bear. "You can trust me. I'm not a wolf or a fox. I mean what I say. Let's work together!"

"Very well," said the peasant.

And so they shook on it.

When spring came, the peasant made ready his plough and harrow, and the bear broke off some wood for him and dragged it out of the forest. When he had set up the plough, the peasant said:

"Harness yourself to the plough, Misha. We must turn over the soil."

Misha did as he was told, and they went out into the field. The peasant took hold of the handle and walked along behind the plough, while Misha walked in front harnessed to the plough. He ploughed one furrow, then another, then a third, but after the fourth he said:

"Isn't that enough ploughing for today?"

"Goodness me, no," the peasant replied. "We've still got another twenty or more furrows to make."

Misha got worn out by the work. When he finished, he flopped down where he was, in the field.

The peasant had dinner, fed his companion and said:

"Now we'll take a nap, Misha, then we'll plough the furrows a second time."

And so they did.

"Good," said the peasant. "Come tomorrow and we'll harrow the soil and sow turnips. Only an agreement is better than money. Let's agree now on who will have what if there's a good harvest. Shall we split it and have half of everything each, or will one of us have the heads and the other the tails?"

"I'll have the heads," said the bear.

"Very well," the peasant repeated. "You'll have the heads, and I'll have the tails."

So the next day they harrowed, sowed turnips and then harrowed again.

Autumn came, and it was time to harvest the turnips. Our two friends got ready, went into the field and pulled up the turnips. There were lots and lots of them.



The peasant cut off Misha's portion, the leafy tops, in a big pile, and carried the turnips off home. Misha dragged the turnip tops back to his den and sat down to eat them. But they didn't taste at all nice.

He went to the peasant's house and looked through the window. The peasant had a pot full of hot sweet turnip and was eating it happily.

"Never mind," thought the bear. "I'll know better next time."

Misha went back to his den and lay down. He was so hungry that he sucked his paw, fell asleep and slept all winter long.

When spring came the bear woke up, thin and starving, and went to ask his neighbour for work again. This time it was sowing wheat.

They set up the plough and the harrow. The bear harnessed himself to the plough and dragged it up and down the field. He grew hot and tired and stood to rest in the shade.

The peasant had dinner and fed the bear, then they both lay down to have a nap. The peasant woke first and shook Misha hard.

"Now we must plough each furrow a second time."

There was nothing for it, so Misha did as he was told. When they had finished, the bear said:

"An agreement is better than money. Let's agree now that this time you have the heads and I have the tails. How about that?"

"Very well," said the peasant. "You have the tails and I have the heads!"

So the bargain was struck. Next day they harrowed the field, sowed the wheat, then harrowed a second time and agreed again that this time the bear was to have the tails and the peasant the tops.

Harvest time came. The peasant reaped for all he was worth, then threshed the wheat and took it to the mill. Misha gathered up his portion too. He piled up the straw and roots and dragged it all back to his den. Then he sat down on a tree-stump to rest and enjoy the fruit of his labours. He chewed some pieces of straw. Ugh! That was no good! Then he chewed some roots. They were no better!

Misha went to the peasant's house and looked through the window. The peasant was sitting at the table eating wheatcakes, washing them down with home-brewed beer and wiping the drops off his beard.

"I must be fated never to benefit from my work," thought the bear. "If I choose heads, they're no good. And if I choose tails, I can't eat them either!"

Misha was so miserable that he lay down in his den and slept the whole

winter through. Since then he has never asked the peasant for work again. If he's not going to eat well anyway, why break his back ploughing the field.



PROVERBS

Patience and hard work win the day.

Sup at another man's table, yet heed only the truth.

Truth does not burn in fire or drown in water.

If you're fond of sleigh rides, you mustn't mind
pulling the sleigh uphill.

Don't venture into the forest,
if you're afraid of wolves.

THE BIG BROWN BEAR

The big brown bear is heaving stones,
And the clever crayfish cleans a coat,
The wolves in the marsh are threshing grain,
Tom Cat pounds rusks, as right as rain,
Puss Cat by the window is threading a needle
While Cocky the Rooster goes chasing a beetle!
The speckled hen yard is sweeping,
The spider a gossamer web in weaving,
Mistress Duck in her skirt a tablecloth shakes,
And her husband, the drake, a fine pie bakes.
But most precious of all is the cow in the shed
Who gives cheese and butter to go on our bread.







THE CROW

A FOLK TALE

Once upon a time there was a crow, and she lived not on her own but with her nannies and nursemaids, her little children and all her kith and kin. Birds arrived from foreign climes, large and small, geese and swans, built nests in mountain, valley and forest, and laid their eggs.

Crow watched all this, swooped down and stole the eggs from the newcomers' nests!

Owl happened to see the crow stealing eggs from other birds, large and small.

"Just you await, horrid Crow," he said. "We'll see you get called to account for this!"

And off he flew far, far away to Grey Eagle in the rocky mountains.

"Father Grey Eagle," he begged. "Call that spiteful Crow to account! She's tormenting the birds, large and small. She destroys our nests, steals our fledgelings and takes our eggs away to feed her young!"

Grey Eagle shook his head and sent his lightest, smallest messenger, Sparrow, to fetch Crow. Sparrow soared up and flew off to get her. Crow didn't want to go, but all the birds rose up and started nipping and pecking her, to make her go to Grey Eagle. So she had no choice. Off she flew with a loud caw, the other birds flying after her.

They came to Grey Eagle's abode and sat down in a circle round it, with Crow standing in the middle, trying to look her best for Grey Eagle.

Grey Eagle began questioning Crow.

"They say you take things that don't belong to you, that you steal eggs and fledgelings from other birds' nests!"

"That's not true, Father Grey Eagle, it's a lie! I only collect empty egg-shells!"

"And I've also been told that when peasants sow their plots, you and your clan go and peck up the seeds!"

"That's not true, Father Grey Eagle, it's a lie! Me, my friends, and our kith and kin, only peck up worms from the freshly turned soil!"

"And folk everywhere complain that when the wheat has been reaped and stacked in sheaves, you swoop down with your kith and kin and start romping about, scattering the sheaves and pulling the stacks to pieces."

"That's not true, Father Grey Eagle, it's a lie! We were only trying to help. We spread out the wheat to make it better in the sun and wind and stop it from sprouting."



Grey Eagle got angry with the lying old Crow and ordered her to be put behind bars in a prison cell with bolts of iron and locks of steel. And there she stays to this very day!

OIL AND VINEGAR

A FABLE

Once upon a time a woman had a strange crystal pot of foreign make. It had two halves, like casks on their sides, the bottoms joined, and corks at either end. One half was for vinegar and the other for oil. You could stand it on the dinner-table.

The woman sent her son to the shop with the pot and told him to buy some olive oil and some vinegar.

The boy went to the shop, paid the money and stood the pot on one end.

"Pour the oil in here," he said.

Then he turned it upside down, without putting in the cork, and ordered:

"Pour the vinegar in here."

He didn't put a cork in that end either.

When he got home, his mother saw there was nothing in one half and asked:

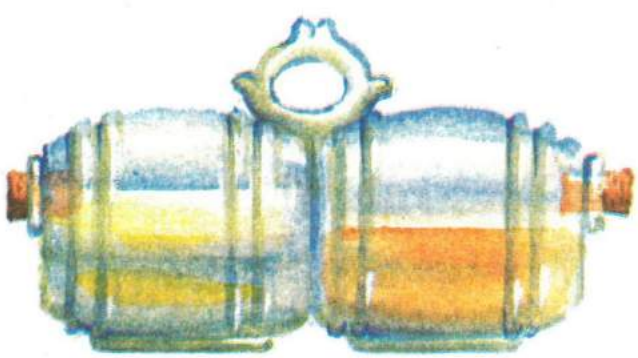
"Where's the vinegar, Grisha?"

"Oh, it's in here," he said.

"Then where's the oil?"

"Here it is," Grisha replied turning the pot upside down.

Then the vinegar ran out too, like the oil had in the shop, and Grisha was left with nothing.



PUZZLES

Three cats are sitting down with two cats facing each of them. How many cats are there altogether?

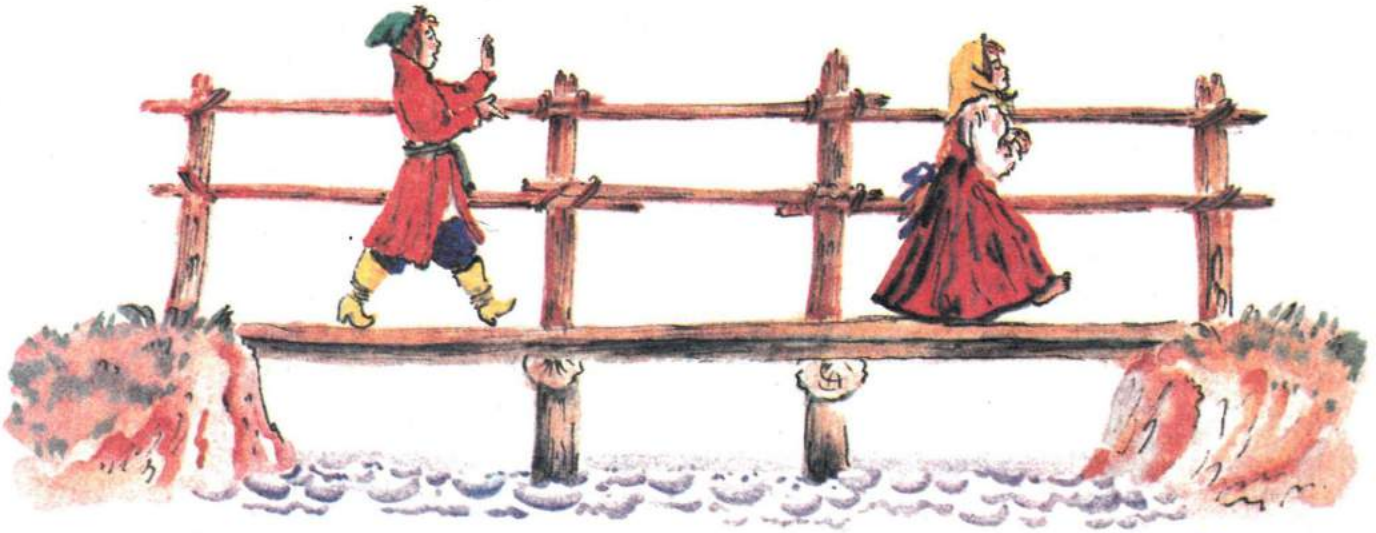
(Three)

Some birds fly into a grove. When two birds sit on each tree, there is one tree left over. When one bird sits on each tree, there is one bird left over. How many birds and trees are there altogether?

(Three trees, four birds)

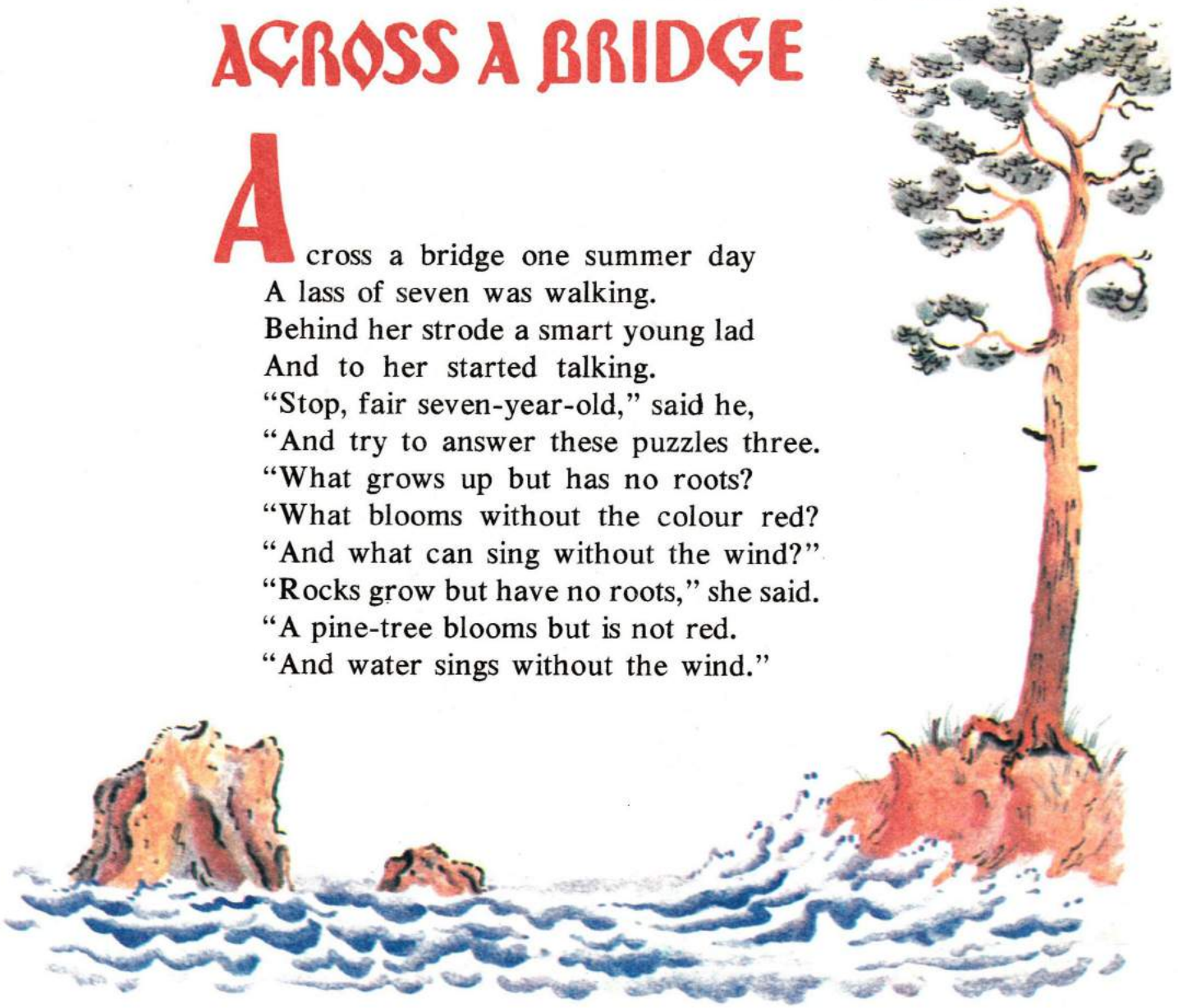
Seven brothers have one sister each. How many sisters are there altogether?

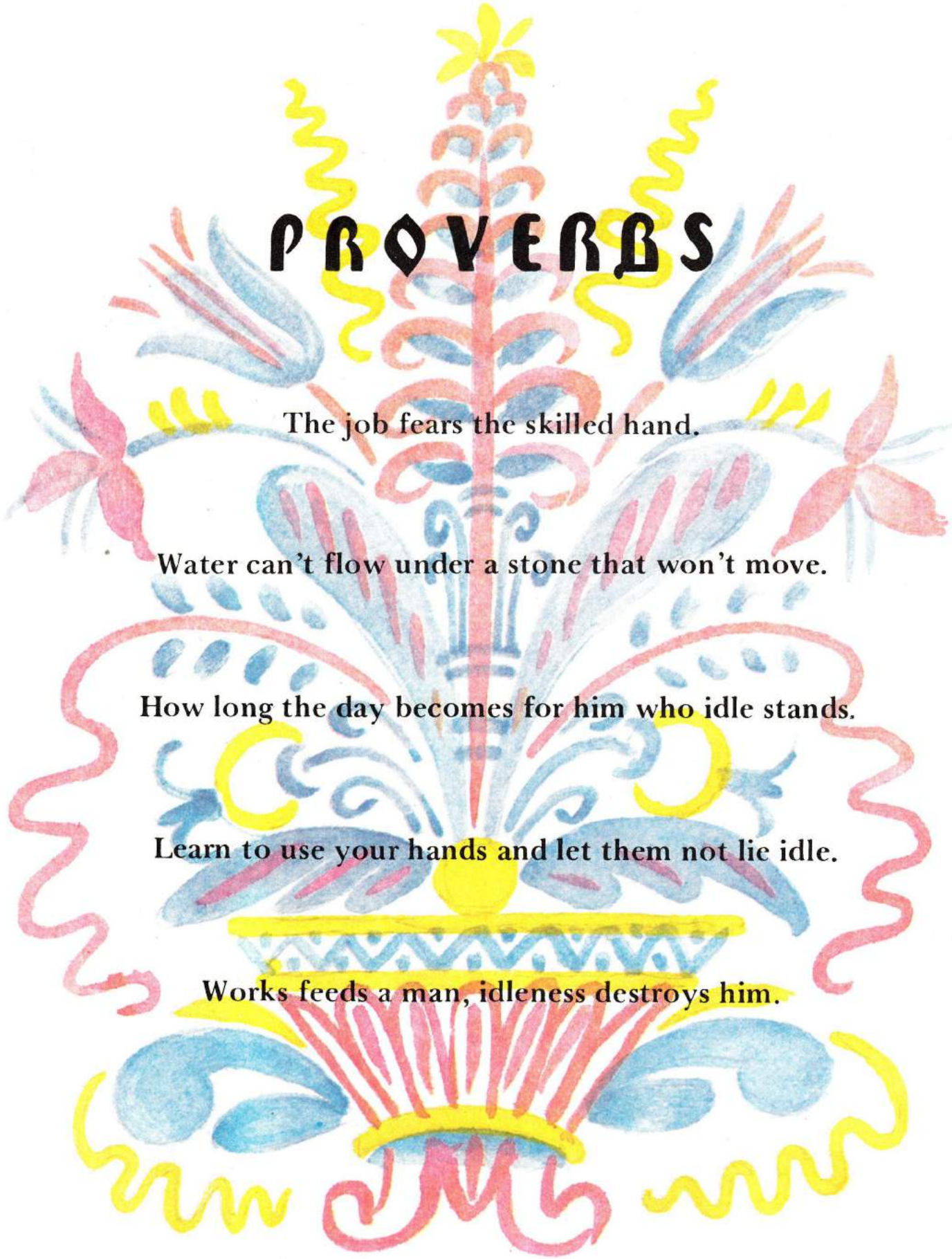
(One)



ACROSS A BRIDGE

Across a bridge one summer day
A lass of seven was walking.
Behind her strode a smart young lad
And to her started talking.
"Stop, fair seven-year-old," said he,
"And try to answer these puzzles three.
"What grows up but has no roots?
"What blooms without the colour red?
"And what can sing without the wind?"
"Rocks grow but have no roots," she said.
"A pine-tree blooms but is not red.
"And water sings without the wind."





PROVERBS

The job fears the skilled hand.

Water can't flow under a stone that won't move.

How long the day becomes for him who idle stands.

Learn to use your hands and let them not lie idle.

Works feeds a man, idleness destroys him.

GEESE-SWANS

A GAME

The players choose one or two wolves, depending on how many children are playing, and a leader. The rest are geese.

The leader stands at one end facing the geese at the other, and the wolves hide somewhere at the side.

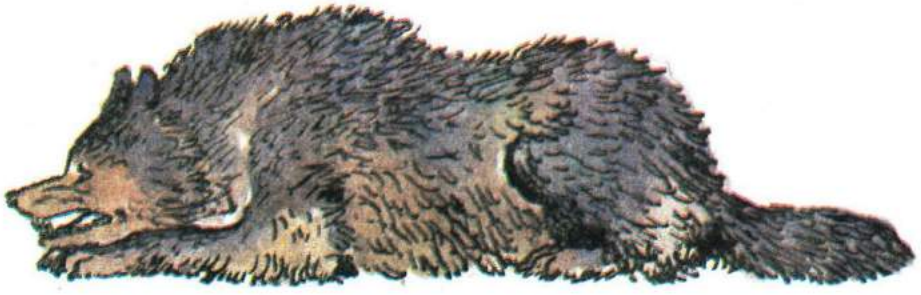
The leader walks up and down. As soon as he catches sight of the wolves he runs back to his place, claps his hands and shouts:

Leader: *Hurry home, geese-swans!*
Geese: *Why?*
Leader: *Run home quickly,*
There are wolves over the hills!
Geese: *What do they want?*
Leader: *To pluck the grey geese*
And gnaw their bones.

The geese run home, crying: "Cackle, cackle, cackle!"

The wolves jump out from over the hills and pounce on the geese. The geese they catch are taken over the hills, and the game begins again.

This game is best played outdoors in the garden.



THE LITTLE SPOILT GIRL

A FOLK TALE

Once upon a time there was a man and his wife who had two children, a daughter called Malashechka and a little son called Ivashechka.

Malashechka was ten or even more, but little Ivashechka was only two.

The father and mother thought the world of their children and spoilt them dreadfully! When they wanted their daughter to do something, they used to beg her instead of just telling her to do it. And they offered her all sorts of bribes, saying:

"We'll give you a nice sweety!" Or something of the sort.

So Malashechka was more spoilt than any other girl in the village and perhaps in the town too! She would only eat bread made from white flour and she turned up her nose at black rye-bread.

Whenever her mother baked an apple pie, Malashechka would say: "It's not sweet enough, give me some honey!" So her mother took a spoonful of honey and spread it all on Malashechka's pie. She and her husband ate their pie without honey. Although they were quite well off, they couldn't afford such a luxury.

One day the parents had to go into town. They began to bribe Malashechka to be a good girl, to look after her brother and not let him go outside.

"We'll buy you gingerbread, and roast nuts, and a nice headscarf,



and a pinafore dress with pretty buttons," said the mother, while the father nodded his head.

Malashechka listened, but her parents' words went in one ear and out of the other.

So the father and mother went to town. Malashechka's friends asked her to come and sit on the grass with them. She remembered her parents' words, but thought: "It won't matter if we just go outside!" Their house was the nearest one to the forest.

Malashechka's friends took her and her brother into the forest. She sat down and began to weave flower garlands for Ivashechka. Then her



friends asked her to come and play catch. She only meant to go for a minute, but she played for a whole hour.

She went back for her brother but, oh, dear, he had disappeared. The place where he had been sitting was cold, and the grass around had been trampled down.

What was she to do? She ran to her friends, but they knew nothing. Malashechka burst into tears and ran off in despair to look for her brother. On and on she went, until she met a stove in the open plain.

"Stove, dear stove! Have you seen my brother Ivashechka?"



"Eat some of my rye-bread, little spoilt girl, then I'll tell you."

"Me eat rye-bread! At my parents' house I don't even touch wheat bread!"

"Shame upon you, Malashechka! Eat some bread, or you'll have no pie!" said the stove.

Malashechka got angry and ran away. On and on she went, until she got tired. Then she sat down under a bushy-branched crab-apple-tree and asked:

"Did you see where my brother Ivashechka went?"



"Eat some of my crab-apples, little spoilt girl, then perhaps I'll tell you."

"Me eat those sour old things! At my parents' house I have big rosy orchard apples and I choose only the best."

The crab-apple-tree shook its bushy branches at her and said:

"Hungry Malashechka was given a pasty, but she turned up her nose at it and said it was nasty."

Malashechka ran away. On and on she went, until she came to a river of milk amid banks of jelly.

"River, river!" she said. "Have you seen my little brother Ivashechka?"

"Eat my oatmeal jelly with milk, little spoilt girl, then perhaps I'll give you some news of your brother."

"Me eat your jelly with milk! At my parents' house I never have anything but cream!"

"If I were you, I wouldn't be so fussy," the river warned her.

On ran the little spoilt girl. While she was running and looking for Ivashechka, she tripped over a hedgehog. She wanted to push him away, but was afraid of his prickles, and decided to talk to him instead.

"Hedgehog, hedgehog, have you seen my brother?"

"I saw a flock of grey geese, little girl, and they were carrying a little boy in a red shirt into the forest," the hedgehog replied.

"Oh, that was my brother Ivashechka!" wailed the little spoilt girl. "Do tell me where they took him, hedgehog dear."

So the hedgehog told her that deep in the forest lived Witch Baba Yaga in a house that stood on chicken legs. She hired grey geese as her servants, and they carried out her every wish.

Malashechka asked the hedgehog as nicely as she possibly could:

"Oh, dear Mister Speckly, sweet Mister Prickly, please take me to the house on chicken legs!"

"Very well," said the hedgehog. And he took Malashechka right into the heart of the forest, where all sorts of delicious grasses grew, sorrel and wood millet, and brambles a-twining round the trees and a-tangling in the bushes, with juicy blackberries ripening in the sun.

"If only I could eat some!" thought Malashechka, but there was no time for that. She turned away and hurried after the hedgehog. He led her up to the house on chicken legs.

Malashechka peeped in through the open door and saw Baba Yaga asleep on the bench and little Ivashechka sitting and playing with some flowers.

She picked him up and ran out of the house!

But the grey geese heard them. The goose on guard craned his neck, cackled, flapped his wings, flew up over the forest, looked around and saw Malashechka running away with her brother. He cackled loudly to alert the other geese, then flew to tell the witch. But Baba Yaga the Bone-Legged was fast asleep, snoring so loudly that the window-panes shook. The goose cackled first in one ear, then in the other, but she heard nothing! Then the goose got angry and tweaked her nose. Up leapt Baba Yaga, holding her nose, while the grey goose told her what had happened.



"All is not well, Baba Yaga the Bone-Legged! Malashechka is taking Ivashechka home!"

Baba Yaga began to rant and rage.

"Earn your keep, you idle good-for-nothings! Bring me back that brother and sister, or it'll be the worse for you!"

So the geese flew off in pursuit, calling to one another as they went. Malashechka heard their cries, hurried to the river of milk amid banks of jelly, bowed to her and said:

"Mother River! Please hide me from the wild geese!"

But the river replied:

"First eat some of my oatmeal jelly with milk, little spoilt girl."

Malashechka was so tired and hungry that she gobbled up the oatmeal jelly, then knelt down and had a long drink of milk.

"Hunger has taught you a good lesson, little spoilt girl!" said the river. "Now sit down by my bank and I will hide you."

Malashechka sat down, and the river hid her in its green rushes. The geese flew up and circled over the river, looking in vain for Ivashechka and his sister, then turned and flew off home.

Baba Yaga was angrier than ever and chased them away to search for the two children. So the geese flew off in pursuit again, cackling to one another. Malashechka heard their cries and ran like the wind until she came to the crab-apple-tree.

"Mother Crab-Apple-Tree! Please hide me from the wicked geese sent by the witch to catch us!"

"First eat some of my apples," replied the tree, "then I'll hide you."

So the little spoilt girl had to eat some crab-apples, but she was so hungry that they seemed sweeter than the ripest of orchard apples.

The bushy-branched apple-tree stood and laughed.

"That'll teach you a lesson, little spoilt girl! You turned your nose up at them, but now you're gobbling them up!"

Then the crab-apple-tree picked up Ivashechka and his sister and hid them in the midst of its bushy branches.

Along came the geese and flew round the apple-tree, but did not see a soul. So off they sped again, back to Baba Yaga.

When she saw them return without the children, the witch began shouting, stamping and screeching for all the forest to hear:

"Wait till I get my hands on you idle good-for-nothings! I'll pluck your feathers, throw them to the wind and gobble you up alive!"

So frightened were the geese that they flew off again after Ivashechka and Malashechka as fast as they could. On and on they flew crying mournfully to one another, the first to the last:

"He-re, he-re? No-oo, no-oo!"

Darkness fell in the open plain. There was nowhere to hide, and the grey geese were getting nearer and nearer. The little spoilt girl was so tired she was almost dropping.

Suddenly she saw the stove that had offered her some rye-bread.

"Mother Stove, please hide me and my brother from Baba Yaga!" she said to the stove.

"Serves you right, little girl. You should have stayed at home, like your father and mother said, eaten what they eat and not taken your brother into the forest! But you're forever turning your nose up at everything, boiled, baked or fried!"

Malashechka pleaded with the stove and promised to turn over a new leaf.

"Well, I'll see. But first eat my rye-bread!"

Malashechka seized the bread, gobbled it down happily and gave some to her little brother.

"I've never had such nice bread in my life. It's just like honey cake!"

"Rye-bread is like honey cake to an empty stomach. But even honey cake is not sweet to a full one," the stove said, laughing. "Now climb into my oven and close the vent."

Malashechka climbed quickly into the oven, closed the vent and listened as the geese drew nearer, asking one another mournfully:

"He-re? He-re? No-oo, no-oo!"

They circled round the stove, but Malashechka was nowhere to be seen. So they flew down to the ground to decide what to do. They couldn't go back or the witch would gobble them up alive. And they couldn't stay here because she'd order them all to be shot.



"I know, brothers," said their leader. "Let's go home, to the warm lands. Baba Yaga can't get us there."

The others agreed, so they soared up into the sky and flew off, far away, across the blue seas.

When she had rested, Malashechka picked up her little brother and ran off home. Meanwhile her father and mother had searched the whole village, asking everyone where their children were. But no one could tell

them anything. Only the shepherd said he had seen some children playing in the forest.

So the father and mother set off for the forest, and who should they meet on the edge but Malashechka and Ivashechka.

Malashechka confessed all, said she was sorry and promised to be a good girl and not to be fussy any more, but to eat what everyone else ate.

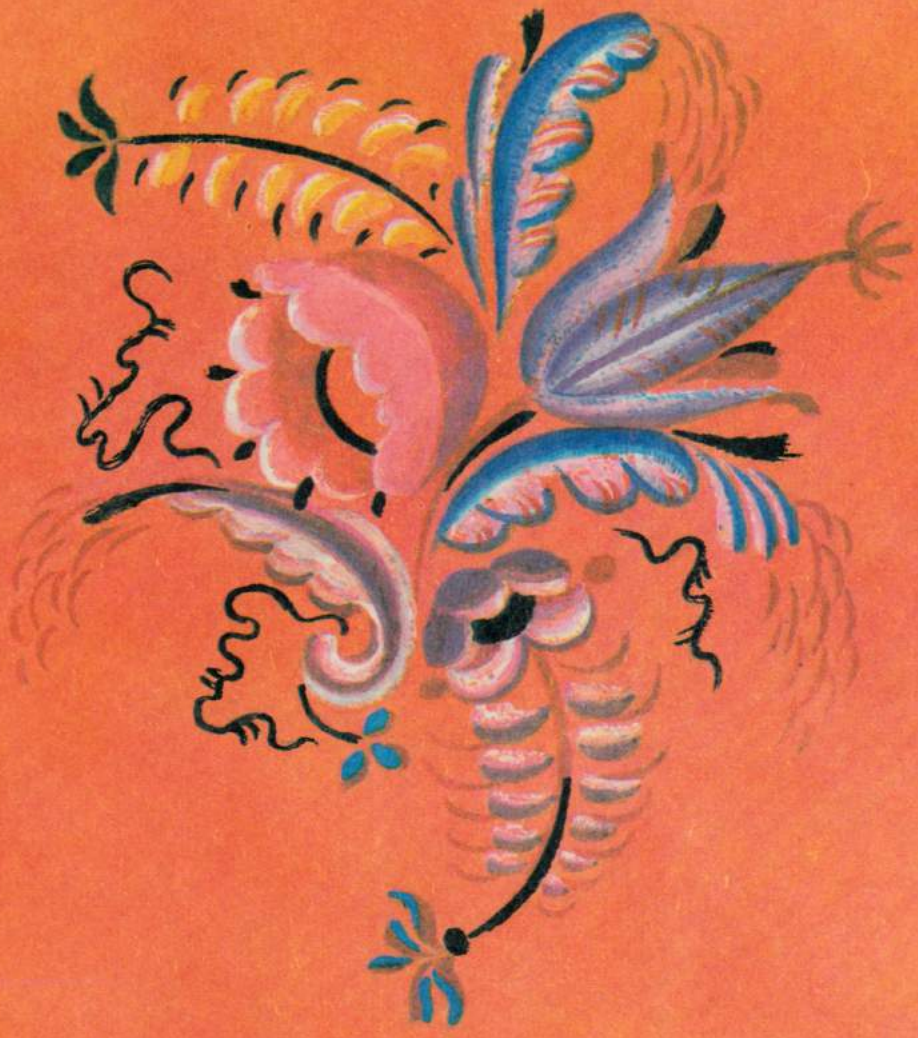
And so she did, which means our tale is at an end.







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